horti CULTURE

for the home gardener

Number 9

Sycamore Blight

In Southern California during the late spring, the Sycamore (Platanus species) may prematurely shed its leaves. The homeowner soon discovers that the diseased leaves, badly infected and scorched, are dropping in profusion. This is the result of a disease called "Sycamore Blight," or "Sycamore Anthracnose," caused by a fungus scientifically known as Gnomonia platani, recently changed from Gnomonia veneta.

Native California sycamores are most susceptible to this disease. Symptoms of Sycamore Blight on new foliage in the spring are often mistaken for frost injury, as the leaves are usually killed completely. On both young or older leaves the general disease symptom is the same. The brown area along the leaf veins extend much faster in younger leaves, causing them to shrivel and drop. In older leaves, which are more resistant to the advance of the disease, the brown vein pattern is easily observed, and diseased leaves remain attached on the branch. The fungus causes twig dieback and produces cankers which can girdle small twigs and branches. After successive attacks each spring over a period of several years, the tree loses so much of its growth and vigor that it often becomes permanently weakened and disfigured.

The fungus grows best in high humidity and cool temperatures. There is a definite relationship between severity of the disease and average mean daily temperature immediately following first leaf emergence. In midwestern states it is reported that the disease is severe in those years when the average mean daily temperature in the spring is below 55°F. Shoot blight decreased from moderate to slight as the average mean daily temperature increased from 55°F to 60°F. Little or no shoot blight occurred when this temperature was above 60°F. Spores are produced in great numbers when climatic conditions are ideal for the production. As the season progresses and dry weather arrives, the spread of infection halts. But the fungus remains in a dormant state in blight area until next spring, when conditions more favorable for growth return. The severity of this disease varies each year according to the critical weather requirement for the disease development.

Cleanliness is extremely important when attempting to eliminate the disease. All infected twigs should be pruned off and all leaves and twigs that have dropped off in winter should be destroyed to prevent the disease from spreading.

It is possible to control Sycamore Blight through the use of organic chemical compounds such as Cyprex and Dodine. Trees must be sprayed in the spring just as the leaf buds begin to expand with the first signs of green. Care must be taken to follow the instructions on the labels. Additional spraying after all the leaves have unfurled will give even better control. Since the sycamores often grow very large, professional tree services may be required to do the trimming or spraying. High pressure sprayers are needed to give the necessary coverage on larger specimens.

In areas where there has been successive years of ideal climatic conditions for the disease, the use of chemicals to control Sycamore Blight is recommended, especially where sycamores serve as the major landscape feature. In more natural environments, trees will usually fair well without chemicals and may even develop another leaf growth later in the year as the mean daily temperature rises.

(OVER)

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DISEASED PORTION OF
A SYCAMORE LEAF

TWIG CANKERS
CAUSED BY BLIGHT